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Prevention focus increases the impact of counterpart cues on negotiation behavior

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Abstract

Purpose – To avoid (costly) conflict, it is imperative to uncover when negotiators cooperate. The previous study has shown that negotiators' cooperative or competitive behavior is oftentimes guided by cues about their counterpart; information about his/her traits or behavior. Using regulatory focus theory, this paper aims to investigate when this is likely to happen. The authors hypothesize and test that because prevention focus (rather than promotion focus) is associated with concerns for safety and concrete surroundings, it strengthens the impact of counterpart cues.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors used two scenario studies and one behavioral negotiation study to test the general hypothesis. The authors measured or manipulated participants' regulatory focus, manipulated counterpart cues by varying the information negotiators received about their counterpart's traits and behavior, and measured participants' cooperative or competitive concession making behavior.

Findings – Results from the studies confirmed that under prevention focus, negotiators' cooperative behavior depended on whether they received cooperative versus competitive counterpart cues more than under promotion focus. Furthermore, results also showed that under prevention focus, negotiators' behavior was relatively unaffected by their own social motivation – i.e. their personal goal to obtain favorable outcomes for oneself or for both negotiation parties.

Originality/value – By showing that regulatory focus determines when counterpart cues affect negotiation behavior, this paper furthers the understanding of when contextual factors affect negotiators' behavior. In addition, it contributes to the understanding of the complex effects of prevention focus in interpersonal behavior.

Keywords Negotiation behaviour, Prevention focus, Counterpart cues, Contextual information

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

When considering conflict-based interactions, it is vital to understand how human cooperation can be fostered to promote harmony and fairness and how, through negotiation,

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constructive joint decisions can be reached. Given the importance of cooperative behavior in conflict settings like negotiation, and the often devastating results when cooperation does not occur, it is imperative to uncover what drives behavior in such settings.

To answer this question, on the one hand, some studies have pointed to personal cues directly related to the focal negotiator, such as social motivation, as important drivers of negotiation behavior and decisions (De Dreu *et al.*, 2008). Social motivation relates to the value individuals attach to their own and others' outcomes. Most scholars distinguish pro-social and pro-self-motivation (Aaldering *et al.*, 2013; De Dreu, 2010; Lumsden *et al.*, 2012). When negotiators have a pro-social motivation, they emphasize maximizing both their own and others' outcomes, whereas when they have a pro-self-motivation, they emphasize maximizing their own outcomes. In negotiations, prosocially motivated individuals have been found to make more concessions to their counterpart, to engage in more problem-solving behavior focused on integrating own and others' outcomes, and to value negotiation fairness and equality, more than pro-self-motivated individuals, who tend to view the negotiation as a competitive game (De Dreu *et al.*, 2000, 2006; Olekalns and Smith, 1999).

On the other hand, besides the social motives of the focal negotiator, previous research has also pointed to variables related to the counterpart that cause negotiators to negotiate in a constructive, cooperative manner or, in contrast, engage in destructive contending behavior. Specifically, cues about the counterpart's traits or about his or her cooperative or competitive behavior have been shown to affect the opposing negotiator's verbal expression and behavior (Adair and Brett, 2005; Friedman *et al.*, 2004; Pruitt, 1981; Tinsley *et al.*, 2002). For example, when sellers had a negative reputation, buyers expressed more anger during disputes (Friedman *et al.*, 2004), and when counterparts were perceived as being cooperative, negotiators expressed more accurate and less inaccurate information than when counterparts were perceived as being competitive (Steinel and De Dreu, 2004). In addition, when negotiators were informed that their counterpart was an expert in distributive negotiation (i.e. effective in using strategies aimed at claiming value), they acted in a more distributive way, by exchanging less information, than when they did not receive such information (Tinsley *et al.*, 2002). Likewise, when counterparts are tough negotiators who concede little, negotiators tend to respond in kind and make small, rather than large concessions. In contrast, when counterparts behave cooperatively and make large concessions, negotiators also were found to make large concessions (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2004). More in general, in mixed-motive settings such as negotiation, contextual factors can promote or hinder cooperation by providing information about whether the counterpart is willing to cooperate or not. Previous research indicates that individuals tend to match counterparts' expected motivational orientation or strategical behavior in terms of cooperation and competition (Druckman, 1986; Pruitt and Lewis, 1975). This might be because of the necessity to prevent exploitation or to adhere to the norm of reciprocity (Weingart *et al.*, 1990).

Although previous findings are informative for understanding the influence of both personal and counterpart cues on negotiators' behavior, they neglect when such influence occurs. In the present research, we aim to contribute to the literature by examining when negotiators' behavior is influenced by cues related to the counterpart, rather than by personal goals such as social motivation. Addressing this issue is not only important from a theoretical point of view, as it would enable us to better understand when negotiators behave constructively or not but also from a practical point of view. The specification of the circumstances under which the counterpart cues (rather than personal cues) influence negotiators' behavior enables designing interventions that better enable successfully

steering negotiators toward a mutually satisfactory outcome, thereby avoiding costly impasse or protracted conflict.

Regulatory focus and counterpart behavior

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998) distinguishes between promotion focus goals, which are directed at obtaining positive outcomes, and prevention focus goals, which are directed at avoiding negative outcomes (Higgins *et al.*, 1994). While promotion focused individuals focus on their aspirations, growth and accomplishments, prevention focused individuals are more concerned with protection, safety and responsibility.

Previous research demonstrated that promotion focused individuals are more self-conscious and more likely to use first-person pronouns in a thought-listing task. In addition, promotion focused individuals were found to be more likely to use a global, abstract processing style (Förster and Higgins, 2005; Friedman and Förster, 2001). From this, it follows that promotion focus is associated with increased accessibility of the self (Brebels *et al.*, 2008).

By contrast, prevention focused individuals because of their concern with safety, vigilance and the avoidance of undesired outcomes (Crowe and Higgins, 1997; Scholer *et al.*, 2010), pay more attention to events in the surrounding environment to avoid or respond to, potential threats. This reasoning is consistent with research showing that highly prevention focused individuals tend to respond strongly to norm violations and reciprocate negative behavior of their interaction partner (Keller *et al.*, 2008). In addition, prevention focus has been associated with a focus on details, a so-called local processing style, which, in turn, has been associated with an increased focus on concrete surroundings and susceptibility to contextual determinants of behavior (Förster *et al.*, 2008; Förster and Higgins, 2005). That those with a prevention focus would be more responsive to contextual cues is indeed, suggested by a study by Beersma *et al.* (2013), which examined how prevention- and promotion focused teams responded to different reward structures (individual versus team rewards). While promotion-focused teams were found to be insensitive to reward structure differences and performed effectively on a decision-making task regardless of reward structure, prevention-focused teams experienced lower error intolerance, higher work engagement, better team coordination and better performance under a team-rather than individual reward structure.

In negotiation, several contextual factors can play an important role in affecting negotiators' behavior and decision-making, such as communication medium (Purdy *et al.*, 2000; Sheffield, 1995; Swaab *et al.*, 2012), negotiator role (for example, buyer versus seller, Appelt and Higgins (2010), and constituency presence (Ben-Yoav and Pruitt, 1984a). Studies that have examined how regulatory focus moderates the way in which such contextual factors affect negotiation behavior suggest that prevention-focused negotiators are more sensitive to the negotiation context than promotion-focused negotiators. For example, Appelt and Higgins (2010) found that prevention-focused negotiators behaved in a more demanding way when they found themselves in a context that increased their vigilance (i.e. when they had the buyer rather than the seller role in the negotiation), but in a less demanding way when they found themselves in a context that reduced their vigilance (i.e. when they had the seller rather than the buyer role). Trötschel *et al.* (2013), likewise, found that prevention-focused negotiators behaved more demandingly during a negotiation when they had reasons to believe they may not reach their goals than when they believed they would reach their goals. Thus, previous research demonstrated that prevention-focused negotiators negotiate in a tough, demanding way when the context they find themselves in informs them that vigilance is warranted. If, however, contextual cues inform them that

vigilance may be unnecessary, they "relax their vigilance" and behave in a less demanding way.

One important contextual factor is the cues negotiators receive about their counterpart; the information that becomes available regarding the counterpart's traits and/or behavior. Because of the interdependent structure of negotiation, an individual's negotiation outcome depends, at least in part, on the counterpart. It is, therefore, not surprising that past research has shown that both counterpart traits (Friedman *et al.*, 2004; Tinsley *et al.*, 2002) and counterpart behavior (Adair and Brett, 2005; Pruitt, 1981; Ten Velden *et al.*, 2009; Van Kleef *et al.*, 2004) are important determinants of negotiators' behavior and subsequent outcomes. Previous research has, however, not examined whether prevention and promotion-focused negotiators differ in the extent to which they are responsive to counterpart cues.

In line with Higgins's (1998; see also Higgins *et al.*, 1994) notion of regulatory focus, we propose that relative to promotion-focused negotiators, prevention-focused negotiators are more sensitive to cues pertaining to the counterpart. Because of their concern for avoiding negative outcomes, prevention-focused negotiators should pay more attention to information about others such as their counterpart's profile and behavior, to minimize losses. Indirect evidence supporting this reasoning comes from previous work showing that prevention focused negotiators, but not promotion focused negotiators, are more likely to avoid further negotiation when their counterpart displays a tough, more competitive strategy, rather than a soft, more cooperative strategy (Shalvi *et al.*, 2013). Thus, we expect that negotiators' behavior would be more affected by information about the counterpart (i.e. the counterpart's profile and behavior) when they are characterized by prevention (versus promotion) focus. We tested this general hypothesis in Studies 1 and 2.

In Studies 2 and 3, we tested an additional hypothesis concerning the type of information considered. Specifically, we examined to what extent the behavior of prevention-focused negotiators is influenced by information that is not instrumental in avoiding potential losses, such as information about one's own goals and motivation (i.e. personal cues). In this regard, prevention-focused negotiators are expected to be more influenced by counterpart cues than by personal cues due to their tendency to prevent negative outcomes and avoid potential threats.

Study 1

Study 1 served as our first test of the idea that because of their hyper-vigilance, prevention focused individuals are more likely to be influenced by counterpart cues than promotion-focused negotiators.

We measured participants' regulatory focus and manipulated counterpart cues by presenting participants a cooperative versus a competitive profile of their counterpart. Participants were asked their offer in a hypothetical negotiation scenario. Because previous research has shown that negotiators tend to mimic their counterpart's behavior and/or traits (Steinel and De Dreu, 2004; Tinsley *et al.*, 2002; Van Kleef *et al.*, 2004), and because we expected prevention focus to strengthen the effect of counterpart cues, we expected that especially under prevention focus, negotiators would be more cooperative (i.e. make a more cooperative offer) when they received cues informing them that their counterpart was cooperative than when they received cues that their counterpart was competitive. In other words, we predicted that negotiators' behavioral intentions would be more affected by information about the counterpart's profile and behavior when they are characterized by prevention (versus promotion) focus (*H1*).

Method

Participants and design

A total of 150 adults (57 women, $M = 35.75$ years and $SD = 9.72$) were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk and paid 0.7€ for their participation. We determined the sample size using G*power, based on 0.80 power, and the estimated effect size of 0.25, to test the expected interaction between counterpart profile and regulatory focus, which would require 128 participants. However, taking into consideration possible failed instruction checks and failed survey completions (Paolacci *et al.*, 2010), we collected data from 150 individuals. Participants were randomly assigned to a cooperative counterpart condition or a competitive counterpart condition, and we measured participants' self-reported regulatory focus. Our dependent variable was participants' negotiation offer.

Procedure, task and manipulation of counterpart's profile

All instructions and measures were presented online. Participants first answered demographic questions and filled out a regulatory focus questionnaire (RFQ) (Lockwood *et al.*, 2002). Next, we provided participants with a negotiation scenario. We asked participants to imagine selling mobile phones, and that they had to negotiate with a prospective buyer about three issues: price, warranty, and service contract (Table I). Counterpart cues were operationalized by first having participants read a profile that described their counterpart, as was done as in previous research (Steinel and De Dreu, 2004). We asked participants to imagine that they had met the prospective buyer at a social occasion previously, and that they remembered the buyer as "a pleasant and warm person who was interested in other people and seemed to care about other people's well-being" (cooperative counterpart) or "an unpleasant and cold person who was interested only in himself and did not appear to care about other people's well-being" (competitive counterpart). Second, this manipulation was supported by the described offer of the counterpart – participants in the cooperative condition read that the counterpart had made an offer of $450 (price), 20 months (warranty) and $25 (service contract), which constituted a value of 235 points for the participant. Participants in the competitive condition read that the counterpart had made an offer of $400 (price), 24 months (warranty) and $10 (service contract), which constituted a value of 15 points for the participant.

Next, we asked participants to indicate what their counteroffer would be in such a situation. Finally, participants answered an attention check to make sure they had read the general instructions (Oppenheimer *et al.*, 2009), which all participants passed, and were paid for participation.

	Price		Warranty (in months)			Service contract		
Level	Price ($)	Pay-off	Level	Warranty	Pay-off	Level	Service ($)	Pay-off
1	600	400	1	10	120	1	50	240
2	575	350	2	12	105	2	45	210
3	550	300	3	14	90	3	40	180
4	525	250	4	16	75	4	35	150
5	500	200	5	18	60	5	30	120
6	475	150	6	20	45	6	25	90
7	450	100	7	22	30	7	20	60
8	425	50	8	24	15	8	15	30
9	400	0	9	26	0	9	10	0

Table I. Participants' pay-off chart (Study 1)

Measures

Regulatory focus. Participants filled out the RFQ (Lockwood *et al.*, 2002). This 18-item questionnaire measures chronic regulatory focus on a nine-point scale (1 = *not at all true of me* to 9 = *very true of me*). An example item is "I typically focus on the success I hope to achieve in the future." This scale consists of two subscales –a promotion focus scale, and a prevention focus scale. Both scales proved reliable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.96 and Cronbach's alpha = 0.92, respectively). Because both scales were highly correlated, $r = -0.46$, $p < 0.001$, and therefore, consistent with earlier research (Higgins *et al.*, 2001; Shalvi *et al.*, 2013), we averaged all 18 items into one scale. Prevention focused items were recoded, and we averaged the scores on the 18 items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$), so that a higher score indicated more promotion focus and a lower score more prevention focus.

Offer. To analyze participants' response to their counterpart's offer, we transformed their offer on the three issues (price, warranty and service contract) into points. Thus, a higher offer meant the participant demanded more points, which constitutes a more competitive demand[1].

Results

Treatment of the data

We removed nine participants for a lack of understanding of the set-up of the task, an ineffective manipulation by taking too long or for not taking the task seriously[2]. The analyses were thus, performed on the remaining 141 participants ($M = 35.82$ years, $SD = 9.89$; 55 women).

Offer

H1 predicted that prevention focus would strengthen the effect of counterpart cues, such that especially under prevention focus, participants would make a more cooperative offer (i.e. would demand less) when they received cues that informed them that their counterpart had a cooperative profile, rather than a competitive profile. To test this hypothesis, we used hierarchical linear regression analyses, with a standardized regulatory focus, counterpart profile, and the interaction as predictors, and the amount of points offered as the dependent variable.

The analysis revealed, first of all, that participants in the cooperative counterpart condition demanded less ($M = 384.10$, $SD = 167.93$), than participants in the competitive counterpart condition ($M = 451.96$, $SD = 194.61$), $\beta = 0.18$, $t\,(137) = 2.30$ and $p = 0.02$. This main effect was qualified by the expected interaction between counterpart profile and regulatory focus, $\beta = -0.18$, $t\,(137) = -2.22$ and $p = 0.03$. Simple slopes analyses (using $\pm$1SD on the RFQ) revealed that for participants who scored high on the regulatory focus (indicating more promotion focus), there was no effect of counterpart's profile, $\beta = -0.01$, $t\,(137) = -0.09$ and $p = 0.93$. However, as expected, for participants who scored low on regulatory focus (indicating more prevention focus), there was an effect of counterpart's profile, $\beta = 0.33$, $t\,(137) = 3.20$ and $p < 0.001$, indicating that participants in the cooperative counterpart condition demanded less than participants in the competitive counterpart condition (Figure 1). Thus, these results supported *H1*[3].

Discussion and introduction to Study 2

The results of our first study confirmed our expectations: prevention focused individuals, but not promotion focused individuals, were affected by the counterpart cues we offered to them: they made more cooperative offers to a cooperative counterpart than to a competitive

counterpart. Although these results thus, suggest that indeed, prevention focused individuals are more sensitive to cues regarding their counterpart than promotion focused individuals, this study leaves several questions unanswered. First of all, in this study, we manipulated both the counterpart's profile, as was done previously (Steinel and De Dreu, 2004), and the counterpart's hypothetical behavior, by manipulating the first offer the counterpart made. It is, therefore, unclear whether participants merely responded to the obvious cooperative or competitive profile or the more subtle cooperative or competitive behavior of the counterpart. The first goal of the second study was to investigate if prevention focused individuals would also be more sensitive to the behavior of the counterpart without any information about the profile. Second, the first study involved a negotiation scenario, and we measured what negotiators' offer would be in such a situation, rather than actual behavior. In the second study, we examined actual negotiation behavior over several rounds. Third, because regulatory focus was measured as a trait variable in Study 1, we could not draw causal inferences. Therefore, in Study 2 we manipulated negotiators' promotion versus prevention focus. This also increases the robustness of our findings by showing that a similar pattern of findings might emerge with different methodological operationalizations of the same variable (i.e. measure and manipulation). Fourth, in Study 1 we did not include any manipulation check. We address this issue in Study 2 by asking participants about their perceptions of the counterpart. In sum, we predicted that under prevention (versus promotion) focus, negotiators' actual behavior would be more affected by information about the counterpart's behavior (*H2*).

Moreover, to exclude that prevention focused negotiators are more sensitive to, more likely to abide to or more inclined to process any information even if not related to potential threats, we included a second informational cue, in addition to the cue about the counterpart: we manipulated negotiators' social motivation, through instructions. Previous work has shown that in addition to be a relatively stable individual difference variable, social motivation can also be activated by features preceding the negotiation. For example, the realization that negotiators have a past history or shared future together (Ben-Yoav and Pruitt, 1984b; Fry *et al.*, 1983) or instructions by superiors informing negotiators that they should strive for equality, fairness and high joint outcomes, both activate a pro-social motivation. In contrast, the lack of a past history or shared future and/or instructions informing negotiators that they should strive for high individual outcomes, both activate a pro-self-motivation (De Dreu *et al.*, 2000). If in Study 2 we would find that prevention focus strengthens the effect of our manipulation of social motivation, this would then suggest that

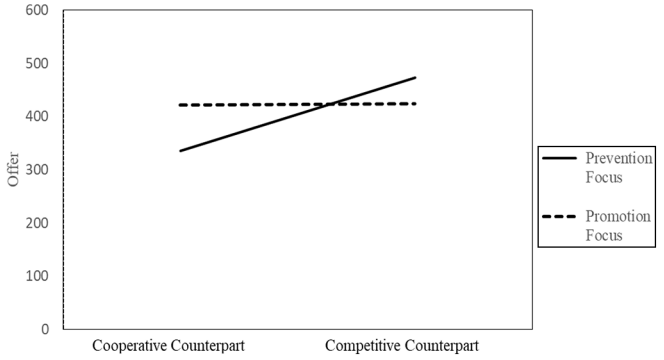

Figure 1.
Negotiation offer as a function of participants' regulatory focus and counterparts' profile (Study 1)

prevention focused negotiators are more sensitive to any information, be it cues about the counterpart or cues about their personal goals.

Method

Participants and design

119 University students (35 men, $M = 21.50$ years) participated for course credit or were paid. This sample size (we aimed for 120 participants to test a 2 × 2 interaction) was based on comparable studies in the field (De Dreu *et al.*, 2006; Shalvi *et al.*, 2013; Sinaceur, 2010; Steinel and De Dreu, 2004; Van Kleef *et al.*, 2004), and availability of the lab. We manipulated participants' regulatory focus (promotion vs. prevention focus), the counterpart's concession size (small vs. large concessions) and participants' social motivation (pro-social vs pro-self), as between-participants factors, and measured participants' concessions over six negotiation rounds.

Procedure, task and manipulation of counterpart's concessions

Participants were seated in separate rooms behind a computer, on which they read that they would engage in a computer-mediated negotiation with another participant. In reality, a computer program simulated this other person.

The task was a computer-simulated multi-issue negotiation (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2004), which captures important characteristics of real-life negotiations (e.g. multiple issues and an offer-counteroffer structure; Pruitt, 1981). All participants received the role of a student board's member who had to negotiate, on behalf of students, with a government representative about three higher-education related issues: the amount of tuition students would have to pay each year, the amount of government funding students would receive per month and for how many months students would receive a public transport travel-card that would enable them to travel for free (Table II). Participants were informed that their profits depended on the decisions made for each of these issues. Furthermore, participants were informed that the government would make the first offer, that they could respond with a counteroffer, and that the negotiation would end when an agreement was reached or when time ran out.

Table II. Participants' pay-off chart (Study 2)

	College tuition (per year)		Government funding (in months)			Public transport card duration (in months)		
Level	Tuition ($)	Pay-off	Level	Funding ($)	Pay-off	Level	Card	Pay-off
1	1,600	280	1	650	280	1	60	280
2	1,725	260	2	625	260	2	58	260
3	1,850	240	3	600	240	3	56	240
4	1,975	220	4	575	220	4	54	220
5	2,100	200	5	550	200	5	52	200
6	2,225	180	6	525	180	6	50	180
7	2,350	160	7	500	160	7	48	160
8	2,475	140	8	475	140	8	46	140
9	2,600	120	9	450	120	9	44	120
10	2,725	100	10	425	100	10	42	100
11	2,850	80	11	400	80	11	40	80
12	2,975	60	12	375	60	12	38	60
13	3,100	40	13	350	40	13	36	40
14	3,225	20	14	325	20	14	34	20
15	3,350	0	15	300	0	15	32	0

The counterpart made the opening offer and proposed different options for the three issues over six rounds. The options were pre-programmed and depended on the manipulation of concession size (small vs large; Van Kleef *et al.*, 2004). In the small-concessions condition, the counterpart conceded 1 unit per round. Here, the counterpart's opening offer was 15–15–14 (1 unit concession from the maximum 15–15–15), and the offer in the sixth and last round was 13–14–12. In the large-concessions condition, the counterpart conceded 3 units per round, starting with 14–15–13, and finishing with 9–10–8. Thus, across the 6 rounds, the counterpart conceded a total of 6 units in the small-concession condition, whereas the counterpart conceded a total of 18 units in the large-concession condition. The greater number of units in the large-concession condition should lead participants to perceive the behavior of the counterpart as more cooperative in comparison to the condition of small-concessions. After round 6, negotiation was interrupted regardless of whether agreement had been reached (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2004). Then, we asked participants if they took the negotiation seriously on a scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 7 = very serious (M = 6.15; SD = 0.73). Thus, participants indicated to take the negotiation task very seriously. Moreover, we did not find any effects of our independent variables or their interactions on the extent to which participants indicated to have taken the task seriously (all ps > 0.15). Hence, this variable is not discussed further.

Manipulation of regulatory focus and social motivation

To manipulate regulatory focus, participants in the prevention focus condition were asked to "describe the negotiation behaviors and outcomes you want to avoid during this task. Think about how you could prevent these behaviors and outcomes" (Galinsky *et al.*, 2005). Participants in the promotion focus condition were asked to "describe the negotiation behaviors and outcomes you want to achieve during this task. Think about how you could promote these behaviors and outcomes".

To manipulate social motivation, participants in the pro-social condition received instructions that it was important that both negotiators would achieve good outcomes. Participants in the pro-self-condition received instructions that it was important to achieve many points individually. Previous studies demonstrated that this manipulation successfully induces a pro-social versus pro-self motivation with which negotiators enter the situation (Beersma and De Dreu, 2002; Schei *et al.*, 2011; Ten Velden *et al.*, 2007; De Dreu *et al.*, 2000).

Dependent measures

Manipulation checks. Four items checked the manipulation of counterpart's concession size (e.g. "My counterpart made large concessions"; 1 = *completely disagree to* 7 = *completely agree*; Cronbach's α = 0.85). Five items checked the manipulation of social motivation (Beersma and De Dreu, 2002; De Dreu *et al.*, 2006; e.g. "I tried to achieve many points for both of us" and "I tried to achieve as many points for myself as possible" [reverse-coded]; Cronbach's α = 0.77; 1 = *completely disagree*, to 7 = *completely agree*). To check the manipulation of regulatory focus, a coder, blind to conditions, coded all written statements into a promotion or prevention-related statements. The written statements were also coded by a second coder to provide a test of reliability. Reliability was measured by Krippendorff's alpha. The manipulation check for regulatory focus met Krippendorff's (1980) standards of reliability, $\alpha = 0.96$, indicating high agreement.

Concession making. Distance traveled reflected participants' concession making (Ten Velden *et al.*, 2009; Van Kleef *et al.*, 2004), measured as the difference between participants'

demands (converted into points) during rounds one and six. Higher distance traveled indicated larger overall concessions made, and thus, indicated more cooperative behavior[4].

Results

Handling of data

Following previous research procedures, participants who reached an agreement before round six ($n = 1$) were excluded from the sample (Van Kleef *et al.*, 2004). We further excluded three participants because they failed to comply with instructions and wrote nonsense during an essential phase of the experiment (i.e. the writing task used to manipulate regulatory focus), and one participant was an extreme outlier ($Z > 5$) on the main dependent variable (concessions made)[5].

Manipulation checks

ANOVA revealed that pro-social participants scored higher on the manipulation check for social motivation, indicating more pro-social ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.37$), than pro-self-motivation ($M = 2.44$. $SD = 1.01$), F (1, 106) = 22.25 and $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.17$. No other effects were significant.

A second ANOVA revealed that participants in the large concessions condition reported larger concessions made by their counterpart ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.15$) than participants in the small concessions condition ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.18$), F (1, 106) = 39.61 and $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.27$. No other effects were significant.

A Chi-square analysis of the coded statements revealed a significant effect of regulatory focus condition, χ^2 (1, $N = 90$) = 64.19, $p < 0.001$. In both conditions, > 91 per cent of participants correctly wrote about promotion or prevention focused behaviors.

Concession making

To again test our hypothesis that prevention focused negotiators would be more sensitive to the counterpart's concessions, we performed a custom-built 2 (pro-social vs pro-self-motivation) × 2 (promotion vs prevention focus) × 2 (counterpart cues: small vs large concession size) ANOVA including main effects and all two-way interactions on the concessions negotiators made. Including the regulatory focus X social motivation interaction allowed us to test whether under prevention focus, not only negotiators are more sensitive to all information, and but also environmental cues. The analysis revealed, first of all, that pro-social negotiators made larger concessions ($M = 166.79$, $SD = 102.14$) than pro-self-negotiators ($M = 106.21$, $SD = 104.11$), F (1, 107) = 11.40, $p = 0.001$ and $\eta^2 = 0.096$. Furthermore, social motivation interacted with the counterpart's concession size, F (1, 107) = 4.76, $p = 0.031$ and $\eta^2 = 0.043$. Simple effects revealed that for pro-self-negotiators, the counterparts' concession size did not affect concessions, F (1, 107) = 0.60, $p = 0.439$. However, pro-social negotiators made larger concessions when their counterpart made large concessions ($M = 195.56$, $SD = 90.86$) than when their counterpart made small concessions ($M = 140.00$, $SD = 106.23$), F (1, 107) = 5.26, $p = 0.024$ and $\eta^2 = 0.047$.

As expected, ANOVA revealed an interaction between regulatory focus and the counterpart's concessions, F (1, 107) = 4.26, $p = 0.041$and $\eta^2 = 0.038$. For promotion focused negotiators, the counterpart's concessions did not affect concession making, F (1, 107) = 0.46, $p = 0.499$. However, supporting *H1* and consistent with the results of Study 1, prevention focused negotiators made larger concessions when their counterpart made large concessions ($M = 156.67$, $SD = 109.68$), than when their counterpart made small concessions ($M = 99.29$, $SD = 84.76$), F (1, 107) = 5.09, $p = 0.026$ and $\eta^2 = 0.045$ (Figure 2).

Finally, ANOVA revealed an interaction between regulatory focus, and participants' social motivation, F (1, 107) = 9.42, p = 0.003 and η^2 = 0.081. For prevention focused negotiators, social motivation did not affect concession making, F (1, 107) = 0.05, p = 0.828. However, and unexpected, promotion focused negotiators made larger concessions when they had a pro-social motivation (M = 203.70, SD = 87.18), than when they had a pro-self-motivation (M = 86.90, SD = 105.46), F (1, 107) = 20.34, $p < 0.001$ and $\eta^2 = 0.160$[6].

Discussion and introduction to Study 3

In Study 2, we set out to provide an additional test of our hypothesis, and replicate our findings from the first study, which showed that especially prevention focused individuals were sensitive to counterpart cues. We manipulated (rather than measured) regulatory focus and included a behavioral measure as our main dependent variable. Furthermore, we tested a potential alternative explanation for our finding, by testing whether under prevention focus, negotiators would be more sensitive to any type of information, including information about their personal goals (i.e. their social motivation).

Findings supported *H1* and replicated the findings from Study 1: using actual negotiation behavior over several rounds as the dependent variable, we showed that counterpart cues, in this case the counterpart's concession size, were more influential in affecting negotiators' concession making under prevention focus, than under promotion focus. Thus, using two different studies, one scenario study and one behavioral study, we find consistent evidence supporting our prediction. Furthermore, we also showed that under prevention focus, not all information is regarded equal: instructions pertaining to the negotiator's personal goal – their social motivation – were not more influential under prevention focus. In contrast, and unexpectedly, Study 2 revealed that promotion focus seemed to strengthen the effect of our social motivation manipulation. In Study 3 we set out to test the robustness of this finding.

Method

Participants and design

We recruited adult participants through Prolific, an online research platform similar to Amazon's M-Turk. Participants were paid 1.3£ for their participation. We determined the sample size using G*power, based on 0.80 power, and the estimated effect size of 0.25, which would require 128 participants to test an interaction between regulatory focus and social motivation. In total, 226 participants signed up for the study. In total, 79 Participants failed

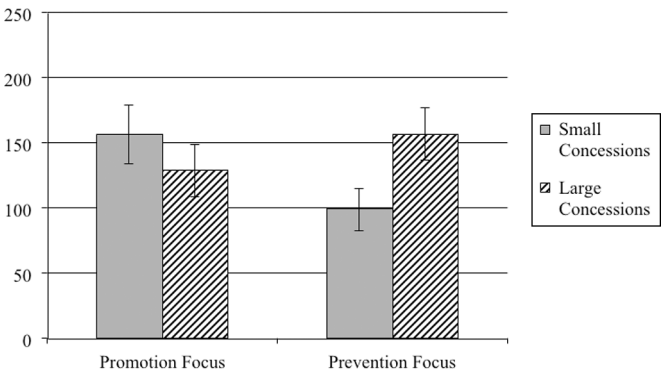

Figure 2.
Concession making as a function of participants' regulatory focus and counterparts' concession size (Study 2)

the attention check (Oppenheimer *et al.*, 2009) and were removed from the sample before any analysis took place. Accordingly, these participants did not receive payment either, in accordance with Prolific's policy and the local Ethics Review Board's policy, resulting in a total of 147 participants (75 women, $M = 28.67$ years, $SD = 5.6$).

Participants were randomly assigned to a pro-social condition or a pro-self-condition, and we measured their' self-reported regulatory focus using the RFQ (Higgins *et al.*, 2001). We measured (rather than manipulated) regulatory focus to avoid running two back-to-back manipulations in an online experiment that potentially suffers from a reduced degree of control over participants' attention and dedication. Moreover, to avoid mono-operationalization bias, we used a different measure of regulatory focus than the one we used in Study 1 (i.e. the 18-item scale developed by Lockwood *et al.*, 2002). Our dependent variable was participants' negotiation offer.

Procedure, task and manipulation of counterpart's profile

All measures and instructions were presented online. Participants first answered demographic questions and filled out an RFQ (Higgins *et al.*, 2001). Next, we provided participants with the same negotiation scenario as in Study 1. We asked participants to imagine selling mobile phones, and that they had to negotiate with a prospective buyer about three issues: price, warranty and service contract. The manipulation of participants' social motivation was done as in previous research and as was done in Study 2 (Beersma and De Dreu, 2002; Schei *et al.*, 2011; Ten Velden *et al.*, 2007; De Dreu *et al.*, 2000).

Next, we asked participants to indicate what their offer would be for all three issues. Finally, participants answered an attention check (Oppenheimer *et al.*, 2009), and were paid for participation.

Measures

Regulatory focus. Participants filled out the RFQ (Higgins *et al.*, 2001). This 11-item questionnaire measures chronic regulatory focus orientation on a five-point scale. The RFQ contains two psychometrically distinct subscales. The promotion subscale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.68) measures individuals' subjective histories of promotion success with items such as "How often have you accomplished things that got you 'psyched'' to work even harder?" (1 = *never or seldom*, 5 = *very often*) and "I feel like I have made progress toward being successful in my life" (1 = *never true*, 5 = *very often true*). The prevention subscale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.62) measures individuals' subjective histories of prevention success with items such as "How often did you obey rules and regulations that were established by your parents?" and "Not being careful has gotten me into trouble at times" (reverse scored). As in Study 1, we recoded the prevention items for the two scales to be combined to form one scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.65), so that a higher score on this combined scale indicated more promotion focus and a lower score more prevention focus.

Manipulation check. As in Study 2, we used five items to check the manipulation of social motivation (Beersma and De Dreu, 2002; De Dreu *et al.*, 2006; e.g. "I tried to achieve many points for both of us" and "I tried to achieve as many points for myself as possible" [reverse-coded]; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$; 1 = *completely disagree*, to 7 = *completely agree*).

Offer. To analyze participants' offer, we transformed their offer on the three issues (price, warranty, and service contract) into points. Thus, a higher offer meant the participant demanded more points, which constitutes a more competitive demand.

Results

Treatment of the data

We removed 1 participant from the analyses because this person did not demand any points ($Z > 4$)[7]. The analyses were thus, performed on the remaining 146 participants (M = 28.63 years, SD = 5.63; 74 women).

Manipulation check

We performed a hierarchical linear regression analyses, with a standardized regulatory focus, participants' social motivation, and the interaction as predictors, using the manipulation check for social motivation as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a main effect of participants' social motivation, $\beta = 0.40$, $t = 5.20$ and $p < 0.001$, indicating that pro-social participants reported higher pro-social motivation ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.21$), than pro-self-participants ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.09$). No other effects were significant, all $-1.41 > t < 1.04$, all $p > 0.16$.

Offer

The results of Study 2 suggested that participants' social motivation would be more influential under promotion focus, than under prevention focus. To check the robustness of this finding, we tested whether promotion focused negotiators would make a more cooperative offer (i.e. would demand less) when they had a pro-social motivation, rather than a pro-self-motivation. We used hierarchical linear regression analyses, with a standardized regulatory focus, participants' social motivation, and the interaction as predictors and the amount of points offered as the dependent variable. This analysis revealed a significant main effect of participants' social motivation, $\beta = -0.23$, $t = -2.82$ and $p = 0.005$, indicating that pro-social participants demanded less ($M = 606.67$, $SD = 140.03$), than pro-self participants ($M = 673.17$, $SD = 142.98$). However, no other effects were significant, all $t < 0.16$, all $p > 0.87$.

We also performed a hierarchical linear regression analysis with the standardized promotion focus subscale, participants' social motivation, and the interaction as predictors and the amount of points offered as the dependent variable. In addition, we added the participants' prevention focus as a control variable. The analysis revealed the same main effect of participants' social motivation, $\beta = -0.23$, $t = -2.83$ and $p = 0.005$, but no other effects were significant, all $t < 0.42$, all $p > 0.65$.

Finally, we explored whether higher prevention focus would make participants more responsive to their social motivation. We used hierarchical linear regression analyses, with standardized prevention focus, participants' social motivation, and the interaction as predictors and the amount of points offered as the dependent variable. In addition, we added participants' promotion focus as a control variable. Again, the main effect for participants' social motivation was significant, $\beta = -0.23$, $t = -2.83$ and $p = 0.005$, but no other effects were significant, all $t < 0.52$, all $p > 0.60$. All in all, these results do not replicate our finding regarding promotion focus strengthening the influence of social motivation found in Study 2.

General discussion

Our results showed that depending on individuals' regulatory focus, counterpart cues are influential in affecting negotiation behavior. In two studies, using different methodological approaches (i.e. a self-report questionnaire in Study 1, and an experimental manipulation in Study 2), we showed that prevention rather than promotion focus strengthens the effects of cues about the counterpart. More specifically, when negotiators were prevention focused, but not when they were promotion-focused, the counterpart's profile (Study 1) or concession

pattern (Study 2) determined negotiation behavior, such that negotiators demanded less and conceded more when their counterpart had a cooperative profile or made large concessions than when their counterpart had a competitive profile or made small concessions. Replicating these results with different operationalizations of regulatory focus provides robust evidence for its role in influencing the negotiator's behavior.

These results are consistent with, and complementary to, previous findings on regulatory focus and negotiation (discussed earlier) that suggest that prevention-focused negotiators negotiate in a tough, demanding way when the context they find themselves in informs them that vigilance is warranted, but seem to "relax their vigilance" and behave in a less demanding way when they receive cues that signal that this is possible (Appelt and Higgins, 2010; Trötschel *et al.*, 2013). The present research thus supports previous findings and extends them by examining negotiators' reactions to cues regarding their counterpart. Indeed, we provide evidence that "context matters" to prevention-focused negotiators: counterpart cues such as characteristics and behaviors influence their behavior.

From a theoretical point of view, our results provide new insights into the role of regulatory focus in driving negotiators' behavior. The current work speaks to the importance of regulatory focus in affecting cooperative behavior in mixed-motive decision-making settings such as negotiation. Previous work investigating the role of regulatory focus in negotiation demonstrated, for example, that those with a prevention focus are more likely to show negotiation avoidance (Shalvi *et al.*, 2013), and are more likely to exit the negotiation when the counterpart is a tough negotiator. Furthermore, negotiators with a promotion focus achieve higher outcomes in both distributive and integrative negotiations (Galinsky *et al.*, 2005). The current research extends this previous work by showing that the role of regulatory focus, and particularly prevention focus in negotiation is more complex: prevention focused negotiators' behavior is affected by external cues, such as information about the counterpart. However, it also appears that prevention focused negotiators' vigilance and receptiveness is limited to information about others, rather than instructions pertaining to their personal goals. Indeed, our results did not show any indication that prevention focus would strengthen the effects of negotiators' social motivation. One could argue that information intended to affect negotiators' motivation may convey clues about the optimal motivational orientation to be hold during the negotiation, and this may be important information. However, prevention focused negotiators' behavior was not affected by this information, possible because it does not entail a threat to be vigilant about. In contrast, counterpart characteristics and behaviors need to be carefully scrutinized to exclude the presence of potential obstacles and threats.

In one study (Study 2) we found that promotion focus strengthened the effect of our social motivation instructions. One potential explanation for this is that promotion focus is associated with a focus on aspirations and goals (Higgins *et al.*, 1994), which may be connected to motivation and values (Crowe and Higgins, 1997; Scholer *et al.*, 2010). Previous work has shown that indeed, social motivation is associated with the activation of an abstract goal and general schema through which the negotiation is interpreted (De Dreu *et al.*, 2007). Building on the established association between promotion focus and both self-accessibility and abstract processing, we could argue that an abstract and self-relevant guide of behavior, such as social motivation, could thus, have a stronger impact when negotiators are promotion focused than when they are prevention focused. Put differently, promotion focus could lead pro-socially motivated negotiators, who value joint success, to behave more cooperatively, than pro-self-motivated negotiators, who value individual performance and self-interest. However, because this effect was not replicated in Study 3, we are hesitant to draw conclusions from this finding. We encourage future studies to address

this finding and to further explore the role of regulatory focus and social motivation in influencing negotiators' behavior. For example, it may be interesting to focus on the link between regulatory focus and social motivation by investigating whether and how promotion and prevention focus are associated with pro-self and pro-social motivation. Because prevention-focused people are particularly sensitive to obligations and responsibilities, they could be motivated to behave "pro-other" than "pro-self" to a higher extent (Beersma *et al.*, 2013).

An important practical implication of our findings is that when negotiators are prevention-focused, interventions aimed at inducing a pro-social motivation (such as instructions by third parties; Beersma and De Dreu, 2002; De Dreu *et al.*, 2006) are less likely to work. Prevention-focused negotiators apparently are more likely to directly react to what they observe in the negotiation than to the abstract frame with which they enter the negotiation. This is especially relevant for those negotiating with counterparts who feel powerless or threatened; for these negotiators, who presumably are prevention focused (Keltner *et al.*, 2003; Neubert *et al.*, 2008), what one does during the negotiation is more influential in affecting behavior than how the negotiation is framed. Our results thus, help to clarify when and "actions speak louder than words" to get a counterpart to negotiate constructively. This implies consequences for both the negotiator and his/her counterpart, as well as for society as a whole; our data show that when negotiators are prevention-focused, they are very receptive to cues about their counterpart. Information that the counterpart intends to be cooperative can then be used to steer the negotiation toward cooperative behavior and constructive outcomes. At the same time, such positive effects are not expected when negotiators have a promotion focus; for them, offering counterpart cues does little to affect their behavior.

Limitations and future directions

The first limitation of the present research involves the scenario used in Studies 1 and 3. Following Steinel and De Dreu's (2004) procedure, we manipulated the counterpart's profile by varying information about the counterpart's traits and behavior. Thus, participants were randomly presented with a cooperative counterpart or a competitive counterpart. Although the overall pattern is consistent with our prediction that prevention focused negotiators, rather than promotion focused negotiators, will be influenced by cues about the counterpart in determining one's own behavior, from these studies we cannot conclude whether the results were caused by the counterpart's traits or behavior.

Another limitation is that our use of scenario studies raises questions about whether the observed effects will hold true in real social interaction contexts. Indeed, replicating our results in an actual interactive negotiation is an important avenue for future research. Related to this, we would like to encourage future research to explore whether the present findings can be replicated in both distributive and integrative negotiations. Speculating about potential findings, the structure of the negotiation (distributive vs. integrative) could be considered as a contextual cue that might be more influential for prevention focused individuals.

It should be noted that the manipulation checks in Studies 2 and 3 indicated that the mean of the groups was never above the scale midpoint (e.g. three on a seven-point scale). Because we were mainly interested in examining differences between groups, the fact that the manipulation check scores are not above average should not affect the validity of our conclusions. Nevertheless, it would be intriguing to know whether higher means on the manipulation check would correspond to stronger effects. Future research could explore this.

Also, although higher than the conventional cut-off point of 0.60, the reliability of the regulatory focus measure used in Study 3 is low (Cronbach's alpha = 0.65). It is not unusual that the RFQ (Higgins *et al.*, 2001) is characterized by low reliability (Semin *et al.*, 2005). However, this scale is very often adopted in academia and we believed it was important to keep continuity with previous research. However, we also believe it is relevant for researchers interested in the effects of regulatory focus in future studies to mention this limitation here.

Finally, it would be interesting to test whether other variables such as negotiators' emotions could account for the effects we observed here. In line with regulatory focus literature (Crowe and Higgins, 1997; Scholer *et al.*, 2010), we argued that prevention-focused negotiators are more sensitive to counterpart cues because they fear undesired outcomes. Because of their concern with safety and vigilance, emotions such as fear and anxiety could lead prevention-focused negotiators to pay more attention to counterpart cues to avoid potential losses. In contrast, emotions like greed could drive negotiators' behavior when they are high in promotion focus. Because of their increased focus on the self, feelings of greed could explain why promotion-focused negotiators are insensitive to counterpart cues. Future research could explore this potential psychological process accounting for our results.

Conclusion

One of the most influential determinants of negotiation outcomes is the degree to which negotiators cooperate. Past research has identified contextual factors, such as the counterpart's traits and/or behavior, as an important driving force of negotiation behavior. Using scenario and behavioral studies, we identified under what conditions counterpart cues become more important. We argued and showed that regulatory focus moderates the effects of both counterpart traits and/or behavior, such that under prevention focus, negotiators react to their counterpart: when their counterpart is cooperative, they act more cooperatively than when their counterpart is competitive.

Notes

1. We also assessed participants' social value orientation (SVO) (Van Lange and Kuhlman, 1994) and report the measure and results here as we did not formulate hypotheses related to SVO. Participants filled in the nine-item decomposed-game measure (Van Lange and Kuhlman, 1994) and were categorized as pro-social, individualistic or competitive, when they made at least six consistent choices in). We combined individualists and competitors into one category (pro-self; De Dreu and Van Lange, 1995; Giacomantonio *et al.*, 2010; Van Lange, 1999).

2. Three participants indicated that English was not their primary language, one participant indicated primary school as highest education, one participant did not make any negotiation offer, three participants took too long to complete the study ($Z > 3$), which renders the manipulation of the counterpart's profile ineffective, and one participant showed an obvious answering pattern by answering every question with six. Including these nine participants, the interaction between regulatory focus and counterpart profile became marginally significant, $\beta = -0.15$, $t\,(146) = -1.79$ and $p = 0.075$.

3. We also analyzed the effects of regulatory focus on negotiation offers controlling for SVO. In total, 11 participants did not make 6 or more consistent choices on the SVO measure and could thus, not be classified as either pro-social or pro-self (Van Lange and Kuhlman, 1994). Thus, these participants could not be included in the analyses. The results show that that the interaction between regulatory focus and counterpart profile remains significant in this analysis as well, $\beta = -0.22$, $t\,(125) = -2.52$ and $p = 0.013$. Exploratory, we also analyzed whether regulatory

focus would moderate the effect of SVO. This interaction was not significant, $\beta = 0.12$, t (126) = 1.54 and $p = 0.13$.

4. As auxiliary measures not central to our hypothesis, we measured participants' mood using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson, Clark and Tellegen, 1988). Participants indicated, on a scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much* their positive (e.g. "enthusiastic") and negative (e.g. "afraid") affect. Reliability of both scaled was good, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$ for positive affect, and Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$ for negative affect· Moreover, we measured participants' perceptions about their counterpart using 11 items: "The other is nice/dumb (R)/easy going/special/friendly/predictable/intelligent/average/boring (R)/interesting/competitive (R)" (Cronbach's α = 0.63). Answers could be given on seven-point scales, ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*.

5. Including these participants, the regulatory focus X concession size interaction becomes marginally significant, F (1, 110) = 3.391, $p = 0.068$ and $\eta^2 = 0.03$ (simple effect for prevention focus: F (1, 110) = 3.96, $p = 0.049$ and $\eta^2 = 0.035$). The regulatory focus X social motivation interaction remains significant, F (1, 110) = 10.212, $p = 0.002$ and $\eta^2 = 0.09$.

6. Regarding the auxiliary measures, a multivariate analysis of variance of the PANAS data revealed, first of all, that pro-social negotiators experienced less positive affect ($M = 3.72$, SD = 0.49) than pro-self negotiators ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.47$), F (1, 107) = 3.74, $p = 0.056$ (marginal) and $\eta^2 = 0.034$. Furthermore, there was a significant interaction between social motivation and concession size on negative affect, F (1, 107) = 5.28, $p = 0.024$ and $\eta^2 = 0.047$. Simple effects analysis showed that for pro-self negotiators, concession size did not influence negotiators' negative affect, F (1, 107) = 0.99, $p = 0.323$. However, pro-social negotiators reported more negative affect when counterparts made small concessions ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 0.45$) than when they made large concessions ($M = 1.30$, $SD = 0.26$), F (1, 107) = 5.03, $p = 0.027$ and $\eta^2 = 0.045$. No other effects on either scale were significant, all Fs < 3.19, ps > 0.076. An ANOVA on the auxiliary perceptions of the counterpart revealed a main effect for concession size, F (1, 107) = 12.03, $p = 0.001$ and $\eta^2 = 0.101$, indicating that when counterparts made large concessions they were perceived more positive ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.61$) than when counterparts made small concessions ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.55$). No other effects were significant, all Fs < 1.44, ps > 0.233.

7. Including these participants, the interaction between social motivation and regulatory focus was not significant, $\beta = 0.01$, t (143) = 0.07 and $p = 0.87$.

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